Poll books deserve look instead of Voter ID

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If — and that's a big IF — Minnesota is going to require government to solve hypothetical problems, solutions at least should be clearly detailed, fiscally conservative and easily amended. (In case those solutions face legal challenges.)

Yet it's clear the Republican-led Legislature is ignoring those standards as they move toward putting a Voter ID constitutional amendment on the November ballot.

The chief authors both have stated their only concern this session is just to get something on the ballot. They say it's the next Legislature's job to figure out how to make it effective, legal and fiscally sound.

All together now: Ready, fire, aim.

Here is the most troubling part: A different (more detailed) solution is offered to the hypothetical problem of fraudulent voting, yet Republicans don't want to touch it. DFL Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, with DFL Gov. Mark Dayton, recently offered a compromise in the form of electronic poll books.

This system provides each polling place with a link to the state driver's license database. (Printed copies could be made, too.) It allows for scanning of student IDs and registering elderly voters who show up to vote but may not have a driver's license or state ID card. Voters also sign it much like they do registration books now.

The books are updated just before Election Day and reflect real time, which prevents voting more than once, either in person or absentee.

Ritchie set the cost at about \$200,000 and says it could be in place by November.

The details need vetting but they already are more appealing than the Voter ID idea. For example, Voter ID costs are known only to range from \$2 million to \$80 million.

Similarly, the Voter ID plan's lack of specifics raises questions about everything from legalities to potential impacts with provisional ballots.

On the former, remember, enshrining something into the Constitution makes it incredibly difficult to undo. Yet what if the details passed next session are challenged?

On the latter, if provisional ballots are allowed under Voter ID, results might not be known until up to two weeks after Election Day. (At least one plan lets voters without the correct ID cast a ballot. They

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then have up to two weeks to show proper ID.)

And then there is the question of how Voter ID assures an absentee ballot is valid.

All these questions — and no answers — about Voter ID make it even more obvious the right policy move to this hypothetical problem is to examine electronic poll books.